

the Holocaust. “Now,” Lieblich writes, “he wanted to be immersed in the stories of people who had put pen to paper in an effort to understand the unfathomable” (79). He is astounded that Frankl’s descriptions of Nazi concentrations are so similar to the pictures still vivid in his own mind, and he seizes on Frankl’s insights as genuine, “alive,” and therefore personally useful.

“Frankl believed in the possibility of maintaining one’s dignity even in the camp,” Lieblich writes, “and of choosing one’s attitude toward the suffering that few escape in this life. Boškailo had never told anyone, but he was secretly proud of the fact that he had never hit another man. . . . He had never taken another man’s food and had rarely raised his voice during month after month of frustration. He hoped he had suffered bravely” (80).

Being able to articulate this pride, if only to himself, gave Boškailo the basis for practical hope in a better future; his moods improved, and he began to pay more attention to his new surroundings.

At about the same time, he realized that he had already been engaged in his own therapy: A gifted woman named Mary Fabri, perhaps realizing that Boškailo was not ready to view himself as a “patient,” had asked him to work as a translator for her as she worked with other trauma victims from Bosnia. Over the course of several years, working with Fabri as both translator and subject, he regained better mental health and found the will to become a psychiatrist who would specialize in the kind of trauma he himself had undergone.

*Wounded I Am More Awake* goes on to show Boškailo in more recent times, using his training to help others as a psychiatrist in Phoenix, where he is now a clinical associate professor at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. The vignettes of encounters with his patients are rendered beautifully by Lieblich, who is careful to tie the drama of small successes to insights Boškailo, against such high odds, has been able to borrow, modify, and utilize exponentially: the immorality of “professional neutrality,” for example, or the inappropriateness of the words “recover” and “acceptance.” (“I prefer the word ‘integration’ because it does not suggest we will ever be free of trauma’s grip,” Boškailo says, “or that a broken soul will ever really be unbroken” [127])

Perhaps the central insight that is revealed in these pages, however, is one that Boškailo gained during his therapeutic work with Mary Fabri back in Chicago—one that, by extension, allowed him eventually to seek out Lieblich. “Early on,” she writes of Boškailo, “he thought he would be a stellar psychiatrist simply because he had survived. But he learned from Fabri that a person does not have to survive extreme trauma to be a good therapist. The patient is the ultimate teacher about trauma, and a good therapist is a good listener” (81).

Another way to conclude that we, as readers, might be able to share in this extraordinary book’s lessons, to some worthy effect, is simply to listen to the lines of poetry, by Mak Dizdar, from which its title is taken: *They whisper around to me that my life has been in vain / They do not know that so wounded I am more awake.* ■

## Right-Brain Religion, Left-Brain Science

BY DANIEL GOODMAN

### BOOKS

*The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning*, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Schocken Books, 370 pages, \$28.95.

THE ULTIMATE RESULT OF SHIELDING men from the effects of folly,” Herbert Spencer once wrote, “is to fill the world with fools.” Throughout his career, Lord Sacks, chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, has consistently been willing to challenge orthodox shibboleths so that Orthodox Judaism may be construed as an intellectually respectable re-

ligion that does not foolishly shield its adherents from the revelations of modernity. Taken as a whole, his literary repertoire, with its felicitous blending of scholarly erudition, verbal eloquence, and an overarching modern perspective, has had major significance for observant Jewish amour propre. In the *Dignity of Difference*, he articulated a courageous approach toward

interfaith tolerance, arguing that no religion has a monopoly upon truth. In *Traditional Alternatives*, he offered an innovative approach toward intrafaith dialogue. And in *The Great Partnership*, he presents an approach toward science and religion that could result in a wholesale reorientation toward much of the Western world's understanding of religion.

The approach toward science and religion that is fashionable in contemporary mainstream Orthodoxy presupposes an omniscient, all-knowing God who authored both the Bible and science. However, this approach can easily run into problems of circular logic in which the Bible itself is taken as the source of scientific knowledge, as occurs in Nosson Slifkin, *The Science of Torah*: “the Torah is a perfect description of all existence, because it is the root of existence. . . . Everything, from the orbits of planets to the shape of a fig leaf, from the dynamics of tornadoes to the markings of a leopard, has its source in the Torah.” A book such as this, ostensibly representative of current mainstream Orthodox thought on science and religion, is suffused with disquieting fundamentalist intonations. It goes so far as to proclaim audaciously that “[t]he reason why scientific laws exist is that the universe was formed by the Torah.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Lord Sacks is also an Orthodox Jew, his approach to science and religion could not be more different than Slifkin's fundamentalist Orthodox view. In lieu of seeking to reconcile science and religion, *The Great Partnership* obviates the entire issue by declaring that it was never necessary to reconcile science and religion in the first place. Because science and religion are completely different praxes, it is as foolish to expect to glean an understanding of science from the Bible as it is counterproductive to look to science for wisdom regarding the meaning of life. As others have observed, this is because science operates in the realm of facts, and religion operates in the realm of values; in Sacks's characteristically pithy, aphoristic phrasing: “Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean” (55). Science and religion have different roles, which only each can fill, and must remain distinct. At the same time, though, science and religion must cooperate precisely

because each offers a way of understanding the world that the other cannot.

Writing for an ecumenical audience, but simultaneously writing as an Orthodox rabbi, Sacks's approach to science and religion is a needed antidote to the incipient strain of fundamentalism that has been seeping into Orthodox Judaism. Opposing the Thomist convergence approach that has characterized modern Orthodox thought, Sacks's Ockhamist approach is as refreshing as it is intellectually palatable. For Sacks, the fundamentalist approach to science and religion is anathema, because religion makes no scientific claims about the natural world. The Bible teaches religion, not science, and to think that the Torah “provides an understanding of the universe in which we live” (as Slifkin writes) to such an extent that one could learn about “the orbits of the planets” from the Bible would be as ludicrous as proposing that one could gain an understanding of synagogue High Holiday services in a chemistry laboratory.

That the brain's dual hemispheres have different functions is the premise upon which Sacks's approach to science and religion rests. As Sacks discusses in some detail, contemporary neuroscience has demonstrated that the left hemisphere is analytical, linear, and atomistic, while the right hemisphere is creative, integrative, and holistic. His major aperçu is that the attempt to reconcile science and religion has been as misguided as Thomist attempts to reconcile philosophy with religion, because religion is an associative, holistic, right-brain activity, while science and philosophy are linear, analytical, left-brain disciplines. In one fell swoop, the entire enterprise of reconciling science and religion (and, ergo, apprehending religion through philosophy) is torn asunder: “Greek science and philosophy and the Judaic experience of God are two different languages, that—like the left- and right-brain modes of thinking— . . . only imperfectly translate into one another” (62). This distinction allows religion to be recognized for what it truly is—a meaning-making enterprise that was never meant to offer scientific facts about the natural world or to be analyzed through the prism of logic.

1. Nosson Slifkin, *The Science of Torah: The Reflection of Torah in the Laws of Science, the Creation of the Universe, and the Development of Life* (Targum Press, 2001), 73, 214.

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Positing that religion sheds light upon “moral truth” (200), not factual truth, *The Great Partnership* may presage a paradigm shift in Orthodox Judaism’s approach to religion. For centuries, traditional Jewish thinkers treated religion as a science, not an art; traditional Jewish life was constructed upon the linear, analytical, left-brain enterprise of Halakhah (Jewish law), a system with a self-contained inner logic. Because legal systems function according to logical principles, law bears more resemblance to the left-brain disciplines of philosophy and science than it does to the creative endeavors of literary fiction and the arts. Conceptualizing religion as right-brained means it occupies the same sphere as the arts, not the sciences.

Sacks’s insinuation in *The Great Partnership* that religion is an art, not a science, is based upon “biology, in the asymmetrical functioning of the right and left cerebral hemispheres, and mediated through culture—through philosophy and the sciences on the one hand, through narrative, the arts and religion on the other” (54, emphasis added). If Sacks’s understanding of religion gains sway in Orthodox Judaism, the implications of viewing religion as an art, not a science, may have unforeseen effects upon attitudes toward Halakhic Judaism: is the left-brain, logical enterprise of Halakhah as foreign to the true essence of right-brain religion as other left-brain disciplines like philosophy and science?

Constitutional law scholars have identified “time bombs” in judicial opinions: obscure dicta often hidden in footnotes that are later unearthed to overturn long-standing precedents. Like a footnote seemingly buried in a Supreme Court opinion that is uncovered years later on behalf of a precedent-shifting court opinion, this is a rather controversial view expressed by the current paladin of modern Orthodoxy that may be uncovered years later in order to challenge certain aspects of Halakhic Judaism. The categorization of religion as right-brained—and therefore more akin to art than science—is a view that could have significant future ramifications, while being sufficiently subtle to make current Orthodox leaders feel obliged to keep their objections sotto voce. The sages to whom Sacks pays homage were predominantly

Thomist in their orientation toward religion and reason. Like Aquinas, they each attempted to reconcile revelation (religion) with reason (science and philosophy), an enterprise Sacks believes is doomed from its inception. Sacks’s multiple references to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik would seem to indicate that they are on the same page when it comes to reason and revelation, when in fact Soloveitchik believed that religion (at least religion in the form of Halakhic Judaism) and philosophy were congruent. For Soloveitchik, who believed that “[a] schism of enormous magnitude has developed between the scientist and the philosopher,” it is not so much religion and science that conflict, but philosophy and science.<sup>2</sup> For Sacks, science and philosophy are left-brain disciplines and are naturally harmonious; it is the right-brain practice of religion that needs to be recognized as a way of thinking that is distinct from science and philosophy.

While Orthodox thinkers engaged in such fundamentally flawed efforts to integrate reason with revelation, non-Orthodox thinkers have long recognized that religion and reason occupy separate realms of thought. And while Rabbi Sacks may be the first major Orthodox figure to challenge the Western tradition of linking philosophy and religion, Abraham Joshua Heschel may have been the first major modern Jewish scholar to attempt to dispel the notion that philosophy, science, and religion were natural handmaidens. Heschel did not have access to sophisticated neuroscience, yet he intuitively seemed to grasp that philosophy and religion use radically different mental capacities:

Hebrew thinking operates within categories different from those of Plato or Aristotle. . . . Geographically and historically, Jerusalem and Athens . . . are not too far removed from each other. Spiritually, they are worlds apart. . . . The concern of philosophy is to analyze or to explain, the concern of religion is to purify and to sanctify.<sup>3</sup>

Sacks’s articulation of the differences between religion and philosophy are strikingly similar to Heschel’s: “the Bible does not operate on the principles of Aristotelian logic” (10), and “first-century Greek

2. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind* (The Free Press, 1986), 3.

3. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 15, 16.

and Hebrew were not just different languages. They represented antithetical civilizations” (63).

Constitutive of the distinction between science and religion is Heschel’s proposition that “[t]he end of science is to explore the facts and processes of nature; the end of religion is to understand nature in relation to the will of God. . . . Science seeks the truth about the universe; the spirit seeks the truth that is greater than the universe.”<sup>4</sup> Sacks’s explanation of the difference between science and religion is remarkably redolent of Heschel’s view: “Science is about explanation. Religion is about meaning. . . . Science tells us what is. Religion tells us what ought to be. Science describes. Religion beckons” (6). Sacks also mirrors Heschel in arguing for some form of partnership between science and religion:

[R]eligion needs science because *we cannot apply God’s will to the world if we do not understand the world. . . .* By the same token, science needs religion, or at the very least some philosophical understanding of the human condition and our place within the universe (200, emphasis in original).

Similarly, Heschel believed that “science is unable to give us all the truth about all of life. We are in need of spirit in order to know what to do with science.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite the multitudinous references to a plethora of books and authors on science and religion, Heschel is conspicuously absent from Sacks’s extensive bibliography, footnotes, and recommendations for further reading.

Rabbi Sacks’s conceptualization of religion may be radical within today’s Orthodox Jewish world, but it is surprisingly similar to the understanding of religion found in the writings of humanistic Jewish intellectuals. More than half a century ago, Erich Fromm recognized that adherents of Eastern religions never conceived of religion as a rationalistic enterprise that contains accurate descriptions of nature, and therefore never felt compelled to reconcile science with religion: “Questions which have given rise to violent arguments and persecutions in the West, such as whether the world is finite or not, whether or not the universe is eternal, . . . have been treated by Hinduism and Buddhism with fine humor and irony.”<sup>6</sup>

And, more recently, Neil Gillman has explained how medieval Judaism’s encounter with the ideas of rationalistic philosophy, and Maimonides’s subsequent attempts to render Judaism in the light of this foreign idiom, resulted in “nothing less than a total transformation of the basic assumptions of Jewish religion as it had been articulated in the Bible and in rabbinic literature.”<sup>7</sup> Evidently, the enterprise of reconciling reason with revelation has been under assault for quite some time, and only now has an Orthodox figure joined the battle.

Notwithstanding Sacks’s critique of Maimonidean inclinations to synthesize religion and reason, *The Great Partnership* is nevertheless part of the rationalist tradition of Jewish philosophy that began with Philo, reached its apotheosis with Maimonides’s *Guide for the Perplexed*, and was extended by Soloveitchik’s *Emergence of Ethical Man*. Saadia Gaon (892–942) was the first Jewish scholar to address the challenges that secular philosophy posed for Judaism. In his *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Saadia also pioneered the trend of penning Jewish scholarly works in the lingua franca of his age. Saadia and Maimonides both wrote in Arabic, which was then the language of philosophy; Sacks also writes in today’s philosophic vernacular, English, and continues the rationalist project of rendering Judaism in the idiom of contemporary consciousness.

Because Rabbi Sacks not only can claim to be perpetuating Maimonides’s legacy but can cite support from classical rabbinic literature for his position as well, *The Great Partnership* is in fact a more authentic Jewish approach to science and religion than the fundamentalist-tinged Orthodox approaches of late. And it is based upon one of the most fascinating theories of religion to have emerged from Orthodox Jewish thought in modern times. The idea that religion occupies the same realm as the arts because it is about meaning, not facts, is revolutionary among current Orthodox *bien pensants*. But it is also an idea that concomitantly restores religion to first principles by prying it away from the foreign influences that have been mistakenly grafted upon it. The story that Sacks recounts about science and religion, therefore, may one day be regarded as a landmark in modern Jewish thought. ■

4. *Ibid.*, 16, 19.

5. *Ibid.*, 19.

6. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (Yale University Press, 1950), 105.

7. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 156.